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## The Therapeutic Benefits of Attunement Through Lindy Hop

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The Therapeutic Benefits of Attunement Through Lindy Hop

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5th, 2021

Sarah Trowbridge

Dance/ Movement Therapy

Tim Reagan PhD, RDT, APTT

### **Abstract**

Dance/movement therapy (DMT) was developed as a tool to aide in therapeutic healing. A foundational aspect of DMT is attunement, the emotional/kinesthetic connection between two people that allows for meaningful and healing bonds to emerge. Lindy Hop is a partnered dance that fosters an environment of attunement, as it is accessed both subconsciously and consciously. This research explores Lindy Hop as a possible method of therapeutic treatment. The literature indicates the physiological need for attunement and how safety plays a key role in strengthening senses of self-identity, nervous system development, and worldview. Four experienced Lindy Hoppers were recruited to engage in a project via Zoom where the investigator analyzed participant movement and attunement before and after dancing Lindy Hop. Afterwards, participants shared their thoughts and opinions about attunement and its connection to the Lindy Hop. The investigator discovered that attunement played a role among dance participants, and that Lindy Hop can function as an intervention in which attunement can be cultivated. A recommendation is made for practicing Lindy Hop as a therapeutic treatment for bolstering attunement of individuals on the autism spectrum.

*Keywords:* lindy hop, dance/ movement therapy, attunement, social dance, connection, autism spectrum disorder, and therapeutic method.

## Introduction

Dance has forever been used as a tool for communication, bonding, safety, building relationships, storytelling, and even spiritual practices like rituals. Dance is a great way for one to express themselves, but it is also able to help build connections and relationships with others through what is called attunement. Attunement is being in connection with yourself and something or someone else. It is also one of the key foundations in relationships and safety. Erskine (1998) defines attunement as a “kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others knowing their rhythm, affect and experience by metaphorically being in their skin, and going beyond empathy to create a two-person experience of unbroken feeling connectedness by providing a reciprocal affect and/or resonating response” (para. 3). Many people describe that the power of dance builds attunement, and attunement builds connection, bonding, healing, and relationship. The act of being attuned to oneself or the people and space around them, can transcend into a nearly spiritual experience. Humans can find attunement at the core of all meaningful relationships, particularly therapeutically beneficial ones.

In my early years of college, I was struggling with my own mental health and the large stressors that come with transitioning into adulthood. I was actively seeking therapeutic services to help get some relief. Coincidentally, I also began my journey with social dancing, in particular Lindy Hop, a form of social dancing (dancing with a partner) that is a fusion of Afrocentric and Eurocentric movement aesthetics. Lindy Hop is typically danced to fast tempo jazz music and on a swung and syncopated beat (Batiuchok, 1988). I was attending weekly social dances in which dancers start the evening with an hour-long dance class and end with a few hours of live music and/or social dancing. The room is filled with people of all race, size, age, and background. I enjoyed spending quality time with a diverse group of people with a common interest. During

this time, I spent a few days each week dancing the night away and creating monumentally strong non-verbal bonds and relationships with strangers. It felt so natural and healing, and I had no idea why. All I knew is there was something inherently therapeutic about learning to dance Lindy Hop that was way more beneficial than my weekly therapy sessions.

In this thesis, I define attunement and what it means to be attuned with your partner through Lindy Hop. I label some of the attributes and qualities of Lindy Hop that foster a therapeutically beneficial environment and relationship. I discover that there are some foundational parts of Lindy Hop that make the dance incredibly healing and provides therapeutic release through bonding, connection, safety and growth. In my literature review, I identify these foundational parts and compare this knowledge and understanding to experienced Lindy Hoppers. I analyze moments of clear attunement and connection between Lindy Hop dancers and share what makes these moments impactful. I explore the history of Lindy Hop, and the cultural appropriation of the dance and the impact cultural appropriation can have on Lindy Hop being therapeutically beneficial for all races. I compare others' experience of the therapeutic benefits of attunement and Lindy Hop and share what keeps the participant dancers in this thesis coming back for more.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Foundation of Attunement**

Attunement is a kinesthetic empathetic bond between two individuals that provides a reciprocal feeling of connectedness (Erskine, 1998). The origins of the word attunement are directly related to musicians. Attunement is to bring something into tune by listening and responding to the instrument (Lutzker, 2014). When watching a musician tune their instrument they immediately focus on their instrument and tune out the rest of the world. They begin

interacting with the instrument and listening to the small changes that bring it closer or further away from being properly tuned and playable. The musician becomes connected and aware of the limits with their instrument. The same connectedness that the musician has with the instrument is what happens between two dancing individuals, and rather quickly in Lindy Hop. I believe that the act of being attuned to yourself or the people and space around you can transcend into a nearly spiritual experience. This spiritual attunement is also present in meditation, yoga, enlightenment, or often called "being in the zone." This is seen in the 2020 Disney animation film, *Soul* (Docter, 2020, 30:11). The movie portrays the main character playing the piano, which transcends him into an effortless flow and attunement with himself and the instrument. The main character ends up in the dimension the movie calls "the zone," a place where individuals go when they achieve this attuned nearly meditative state. The characters define this space: "You know how when you humans are really into something, and it feels like you are in another place? It feels like you're in the zone, right? Well, this is the zone; it's the space between the physical and the spiritual" (Docter, 2020, 30:11). The movie *Soul* effortlessly describes the mental state that attunement can bring the human mind to. Attunement can happen with an object, plant, animal, noise, person or themselves.

Similarly, Batiuchok's thesis (1988) also mentions the transcendent state that can arise when dancing Lindy Hop. She writes "it is good exercise and brings balance and centeredness to the whole being. If done well, it may rise to the level of artistry and spiritually uplift the participants and audience" (p. 13). Many are aware of the magical state that dancing and other art forms can transcend us into, but limited research has been done on it. The benefits of this have been shown through research of meditation and other mindful practices, but why not social

dance? However, before I begin to link Lindy Hop into this, I will further analyze how attunement plays a role in therapy.

Attunement is at the foundation of every meaningful relationship, and is ultimately the goal every clinician is trying to achieve. Therapy is not about the methods of healing and how much knowledge the therapist has, but it's about the connection and relationship with the client. A dance therapist facilitates self-development through the use of kinesthetic empathy and mirroring (Fischman, 2009). Dance/ movement therapists develop the skill of connection through non-verbal communication and teach their clients how to tune into their bodies and begin to reflect within themselves, then transfer that knowledge to people around them. Dance/ movement therapists help their clients become more aware of their mind-body connection. The development of attunement starts at birth between the infant and their caregivers. Attunement is an instinctual reaction for connection either with an object such as an instrument, or the people and space around us. Attunement between mother and child is extremely powerful to witness and starts even prior to birth. The mother listens to her infant's cry and makes minor adjustments to the infant to find a sense of harmony. It is important to add that this parental attunement instinct is not subjective to biological caregivers. In other words, the bond of attunement and an infant can be seen across all family types such as adoptive couples (Honig, 2014, p. 200). Research shows that misattunement between infant and caregivers are more common in adoptive babies as the connection doesn't begin to develop until after the baby is born, whereas biological parents have a head-start during utero growth (Honig, 2014). Attunement is vital to a child's ability to learn and regulate their nervous system. Some theorists even argue that the caregiver-child attunement is where different attachment styles develop (Turning Point Therapy, 2016).



Not only does attunement help in our psychological development, but it also aids in emerging skills of empathy, mindfulness, immediacy, active listening, present experience, knowledge, body awareness and cognitive understanding. When caregivers provide a balanced attunement to their child during infancy development, they are aiding in the growth of safety and understanding of the world. Siegel (1999) developed a scientific methodology that indicated the development and organization of attachment in relationships during infancy. He believed that this methodology is directly connected to emotional regulation, social relatedness, access to autobiographical memory and the development of self-reflection and narration. Similarly, Allan Schore (2003) believed that misattuned relational environments can likely lead to high levels of negative affect that are growth-inhibiting, particularly within the first three years of life, which are critical for brain and spinal cord development. In other words, when a caregiver is over-protecting and responding too much, they are telling the infant “everything is dangerous”, and on the other hand when they do not respond enough the child might hurt themselves or need additional encouragement (Turning Point Therapy, 2016). As a result of proper caregiver kinesthetic attunement, the infant is then able to develop a range of skills, a general understanding of safety, connection, and meaning of the world and themselves.

It is clear that attunement and connection is vital to our biological and emotional development. Many circumstances can inhibit the proper attunement and development between caregiver and child. Misattunement can have negative impacts in our self-development and adult functioning in the world. Those who may have not developed a full understanding of attunement in infancy would benefit greatly from a type of therapy that focuses on the skills of attunement and connection such as Lindy Hop. Lindy Hop primarily focuses on connection to other

individuals through non-verbal connection. This is a great clinical tool to use with a population that struggles with socialization, connection, and attunement.

### **Lindy Hop History and Appropriation**

Lindy Hop is a very historically rich and complex dance style. The term Lindy Hop was coined after Charles Lindbergh took the first transatlantic flight from New York to Paris in 1927. “It just so happens that around this time, the partnered jazz dances of the predominantly African-America New York neighborhood of Harlem had evolved one step further” (White, 2013, para. 13). After Lindbergh completed his flight, many newspapers were using the term “Lindy Hop” which eventually evolved to be known as the dance society knows today. It is challenging to fully compile all of the history of this dance because it has inadvertently evolved over the years and was not widely historically documented (White, 2013).

Lindy Hop also known as The Jitterbug, was one of the many dance styles that became wildly popular in the late 20s and 30s during America's Great Depression (The Call of the Jitterbug, 1989). Lindy Hop served the American people in so many ways during times of harsh living conditions, systemic racism, the prohibition and so many other sociocultural and historical contexts. The Great Depression sparked emotion in many people, particularly in Black communities, which, in turn, motivated people to find a means of expressing their hardships through dance, just as people have seen throughout African history. Although there is some research and history at our current disposal, what is documented is limited, as well as controversial. Many believe that Lindy Hop developed as a defiant and expressive response to the struggles caused by the Great Depression in the early 1920s (Panganiban, n.d). This opinion is seen as controversial in some places across the world, with others believing that the dance developed by White people. This social dance form was danced and developed predominantly by

Black dancers in Harlem (White, 2013). Regardless of the development of Lindy Hop, the dance is a blend of Euro- and Afro-centric dance aesthetics.

It is important to note that the history of Lindy Hop is tightly intertwined with the cultural appropriation of this dance style. In the 1930s, African dance styles were often imitated and mocked so greatly to the point of shaping their dance styles into a whole new style - the Jitterbug. Norma Miller who is one of the founding Lindy Hoppers, describes the Jitterbug as the white word for Lindy Hop (The Call of the Jitterbug, 1989). When Lindy Hop's foundational movement is broken down, the African aesthetic and movement profiles begin to shine through. It is important to mention that Lindy Hop is a Black dance that has been appropriated over the years to fit the "white body," which ultimately changes the foundation of the dance itself. As this dance has been shaped for White populations, this may also affect who is most likely to receive the therapeutic benefits from Lindy Hop. I want to ensure that I acknowledge Lindy Hop as a stolen dance, that may bring a sense of disconnect to people of color in the Lindy Hop scene. The amount of young Black dancers continuing this dance style today is limited. Before the popularization and appropriation of Lindy Hop, it was often deemed as over-sexualized and viewed negatively (Batiuchok, 1988). The Lindy Hop seen today is far from the Lindy Hop or Jitterbug dancers used to know. The popularized version of Lindy Hop viewed today, is the blend of Afro-Euro dance aesthetics combined into the common form of modern Lindy Hop.

### **Lindy Hop Basics**

Lindy Hop is a dance style that falls under the umbrella term Swing Dancing. While Swing can be danced to a variety of music styles, Lindy Hop is most often danced to Big Band music of the '40s and Jazz (Harris et al., 1998). Lindy Hoppers often dance to popular Jazz musicians such as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie and so on. Lindy Hop is

typically an up-tempo dance style, meaning the music is often fast and upbeat. Lindy Hop adapts “the embracing hold, and the turns from Europe, the breakaway and solid, earthy body posture from Africa. The dance evolved along with the new swing music, based on earlier dances such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom, by black people in Harlem” (Renzland, p. 1). Renzland explains how the Afro and Euro-centric dance styles blend together to form Lindy Hop, which combines solo and partnered moves. There is a defined leader and follower, typically this is a male and female dancer. See figure 1 for a picture of what vintage Lindy Hop looks like.

Figure 1

*Vintage Lindy Hop*



*Note.* Figure 1 shows Lindy Hoppers during the height of popularity. Retrieved from

<https://www.vintag.es/2018/01/lindy-hop-dance-that-defined-swing-era.html>

As society continues on the journey of equality, the Lindy Hop dance scene has seen a rise in switch roles, meaning female leaders and male followers. If viewed from a bird’s-eye view, Lindy Hop is a circular dance. The leader and follower are following the same movement

fundamentals. Lindy Hop consists of a mixture of six- and eight-count steps. Both dancers are following the “rock-step, triple step, triple step” six-step fundamental. After being able to complete the six-count step, the dancers then expand to eight-count steps, which follows the “rock-step, triple-step, step, step, triple-step” basic fundamental. As the dancers become comfortable switching between the six- and eight-count steps, the couples can move into variations of combining movements, adding in Charleston which is another form of swing dancing, and acrobatic moves called ariels.

I find it helpful to explain Lindy Hop like it is a language. As humans begin to learn how to communicate through language, we learn sounds, then words, which form into small sentences. After we comprehend simple sentence structure, we practice complex sentences and abstract thought and concepts. When having a conversation with someone we can assume that they understand the foundations of the language so we can have a fluid, and playful conversation where both individuals are speaking, listening and offering new ideas to the conversation. Lindy Hop is another form of communication, it just isn't verbal. Lindy Hoppers master non-verbal listening skills. Similarly, Lindy Hoppers are all over the world which has created variations of how the dance looks and feels across the world, I like to think of this as Lindy Hop accents. Just as English has many dialects, dancing and non-verbal communication does too! That is why Lindy Hoppers are always developing and practicing the skill of attunement, even though it is subconscious.

### **Safety in Attunement**

Attunement is the foundation to any meaningful relationship, particularly in a therapeutically beneficial one. However, prior to reaching a state of attunement, the individual(s) need to achieve a level of safety. In a clinician-client relationship this comes with time, rapport

and bonding exercises. Within the context of Lindy Hop, it is likely that the individual is dancing with strangers. This can make it much more challenging to foster an environment that is safe, especially if there are a large number of beginners on the social dance floor that do not know the cultural “rules” of the dance, such as no lifting your partner, or pulling hard on the arm and so forth. To have a general sense of safety on the social floor, the individual needs to have a comfortable understanding of the dance itself, social expectations, and bodily awareness of themselves and others. In order for the individual to attune to others, they first need to attune to themselves.

**Figure 2**

*Maslow's Hierarchy Needs*



*Note.* This image displays Maslow’s Hierarchy Needs with the bottom of the pyramid being primary needs first, and the top of the pyramid being the goal of self-actualization. From McLeod, 2020, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

To create a space that is therapeutically beneficial for anyone, safety needs to be established as a priority. In the 1960s a psychoanalyst by the name of Joseph Sandler introduced

the idea of safety into the field of psychology. Sandler argued that safety is what determined if the subconscious would be able to enter conscious awareness and further self-development and healing (Lichtenberg, 2018). Similarly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates that in order for humans to achieve self-actualization, humans need to have basic physiological needs met first (think food, water, shelter) and then safety (see Figure 2).

After basic safety has been met, the next need is for belongingness, love, and socialization (Huitt, 2007). When viewing Maslow's hierarchy of needs objectively, one can conclude that Lindy Hop encourages an environment where all of these needs are fulfilled cultivating a therapeutically beneficial environment. Here are some examples of how Lindy Hop can cultivate a therapeutically beneficial environment; the dance in-itself creates bodily awareness, emotional expression through movement, and connection to another individual. The environment of the dance encourages a feeling of (a) community, (b) friendship, (c) intimacy (d) self-esteem, (e) respect, (f) status and (g) recognition. Lindy Hop dancers also require a level of determination and mental/ physical strength and endurance to continue to grow, which is where the individual starts to fall into the self-actualization category of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Lindy Hop fosters an environment for love and belonging in a community and partnership with other dancers. Lindy Hop helps build self-esteem and self-determination through dedication, practice and attunement, then ultimately, self-actualization. Once an individual has gone through all of the stages, they are able to express their subconscious and consciously on an authentic level without restraints of judgement or insecurities. Janet Adler (1999) describes this as Authentic Movement.

Authentic Movement is a term coined by Janet Adler (1999), a Dance/ movement therapist. Authentic Movement happens when there is a dancer and a witness. While the dancer

is moving, they focus on allowing the movement to just flow naturally. They do not focus on presenting or performing movement, but following their instincts and impulsive movements. While the dancer is experiencing their subconscious flowing through their movement, the witness is taking note about their reactions and witnessing. After the mover completes their session the witness and mover come together and talk about the experience. The witness labels what they saw without imposing their opinions, values, or preferences. They use factual statements to help the mover gain another level of understanding of themselves and the subconscious state of movement they were just in, to find self-actualization. (Adler, 1999). What makes Authentic Movement such an important foundational piece of Dance/ movement therapy is mirror neurons, attunement, and the act of embodiment itself.

All of these foundational parts of Authentic Movement, are also present within Lindy Hop dancing. The only difference is that both individuals are witnessing and moving simultaneously, as a unit during Lindy Hop. Both people in partnership are non-verbally communicating through their reactionary movements what they are witnessing from their partner. They are both responding instantaneously. Lindy Hop is a completely improvisational dance style, so both dancers are expressing themselves authentically and sub-consciously in the moment directly to their partner. Janet Adler (1999) highlights mirroring and embodiment as key parts of what makes Authentic Movement so valuable. Being that Lindy Hop also encompasses all these therapeutic qualities, I argue that after safety and physiological needs are met, Lindy Hop is just as therapeutic.

### **Methods**

I knew from the start that I had to get a deeper understanding of how other Lindy Hoppers view our dance as therapeutic. In order to answer my questions, I needed to have



participants meet in a group setting with a dance partner somehow. Cultivating a meaningful group dance experiential during a pandemic was a big challenge. Questions were constantly popping up and potentially getting in the way of making the experiential possible. The first challenge I encountered was the means of how I would safely get a group of dancers together during COVID-19. How would I be able to facilitate dancing safely while also being able to see the attunement and connection between the dancers? Finding a solution for this issue was no small feat. On the other hand, I was aware of how socially deprived people were during the pandemic that I had the desire to heighten the benefits of social benefits through a virtual social dancing experience.

While developing my plan for this thesis I knew that I wanted to connect with other Lindy Hoppers within the dance scene in Orlando, FL to apply my investigation to them. I wanted to label and identify what others experience with Lindy Hop and if they would consider it to be therapeutic. I reached out to my local dance network and asked for volunteers willing to partake in my thesis, I had five participants respond. After consulting with the participants about safety and convenience it was clear the experiential needed to be held virtually over Zoom, a video conference application. I figured this would be the case so when reaching out to my local dance network, I made sure to state that participants needed to have their own partner they felt safe dancing with. I did end up having one person volunteer who did not have a partner. After careful consideration, I decided to not include the solo participant's movement analysis in this thesis. While I do believe that solo movement is healing and also therapeutic, it does not fall in line with my research question, as I aimed to compare the partnership's connection before, during and after dancing Lindy Hop and why the partnership in itself is healing.

When choosing my participants, it was crucial that all of the dancers had an extensive knowledge about Lindy Hop and the social constructs of the dance scene. They needed to have an understanding of the fundamentals and social dance culture. This was important to my research question, as I am trying to label what people believe are the aspects of Lindy Hop that are so beneficial. Which is why having people that have experienced it extensively is valuable. As a result, all the participants have danced Lindy Hop for a significant amount of time and comprehend the nuances of the dance. I developed a method outline, which I have reproduced from my notes and include in Table 1.

**Table 1*****Community Engagement Outline***

| <b>Community Engagement Outline</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Method</b> Over Zoom 3/5/21 2:00-3:30pm EST   |   |
| <b>Goal</b>  | <b>Participants</b>   |
| To gain perspective and understanding of other dancer's experience with the benefits that Lindy Hop provides and their definition of attunement. | Participants' ages ranged from 20s to mid- 30s. Participants consisted of two men and two women. Both couples called in to the Zoom session together from the same household. |
| How do others feel emotionally and kinesthetically aware of themselves and others? What keeps them coming back for more?                         |   |

**Table 2*****Community Engagement Schedule***

| Schedule  |
|---|
| <b>2:00-2:15 General Check-in/Catch up:</b> Allow the group to acclimate to each other (to create a sense of community and safety in the group).  |
| <b>2:15-2:20 Disclosure statement:</b><br>Nothing is required and you don't have to answer my questions or you are welcome to tell me individually if preferred, this will be a published document, none of your personal info or direct quotes will be used, you can revoke your consent at any time, verbal consent from everyone.  |
| <b>2:20-2:30 Body Scan/ Self-check in:</b> Do you feel connected to yourself and the environment around you? How do you feel right now?   |
| <b>2:30-2:35 Free Write:</b> Free-write about your meditation and check-in  |
| <b>2:35-2:45 Dance:</b> Dance to at least two songs, ask the group if they want more than two and what songs they prefer  |
| <b>2:45-2:55 Regroup second body scan/Self check in:</b> How do you feel connected to yourself and the environment (including the people) around you? How do you feel right now? Is it different than before? Is there more or less micro/macro awareness?  |
| <b>2:55-3:30 Open discussion and questions</b><br>My approach with the group was to remain within the structure of the outline, but provide enough space for the group to feel autonomy and choice within all other aspects of the experiential. It was important each participant felt value in the group, which is why I consistently checked-in to see if they wanted extra journal reflection time, song choices, how many times they wanted to dance, break lengths, and so on. As stated previously, safety is vital for proper attunement connection and so giving as many options to create autonomy, vocal expression and a space to express freely was very valuable. |

During the experiential I took extensive notes about what the participants were saying, as well as their body language. As a dance therapist, it was my responsibility to analyze their movement qualities before and after dancing Lindy Hop in order to see the shift in their body language. I asked myself the following questions: (a) are participants connected to the person around them? (b) are they engaging in a movement conversation with their partner? (c) Is this conversation call and response or one-sided? and (d) are dancers mirroring their partner and aware of subtle shifts their partner invites? Immediately after the experiential, I took some time to reflect and journal on what I saw within each person and the information they shared with me. After finishing my notes, I did an artistic response and created a free movement piece that shared and expressed how I had felt up to that point. Creating an artistic response helped me organize my thoughts and feelings into each category to make sense of the multi-layered information I had just received.

### **Results**

Throughout this entire process, I developed a very basic understanding of some possible reasons as to why Lindy Hop is therapeutic. The answers are not all within this thesis. This is just the beginning of a potentially very large research project. I have many questions left unanswered: how does the brain change when a person becomes attuned to themselves and others? What are the aspects of Lindy Hop that researchers can take and apply to clinical work? What are the demographic populations that respond really well and need this work the most? I cannot answer these questions, but I can provide some basic knowledge of attunement through Lindy Hop based off my experience, research, and participants' knowledge.

Prior to dancing, I asked my participants to do a quick body scan and reflect on a few questions. Do you feel connected to yourself and the environment around you? How do you feel

right now? The importance of the self-check in was to allow the participants to identify their current physical and emotional state to have a point of reference to compare it to after dancing. After consulting with the participants, they chose to dance to two songs. They chose the song, which, as stated previously, is important to allow autonomy. I took particular note of each couple's body language between the first and second song. It was extremely clear in their body language that the first song's intended purpose was a warm-up. Throughout the first few minutes, each participant slowly began to physically sink more into their bodies. With both couples there was a clear shift in how the individuals moved and responded to one another.

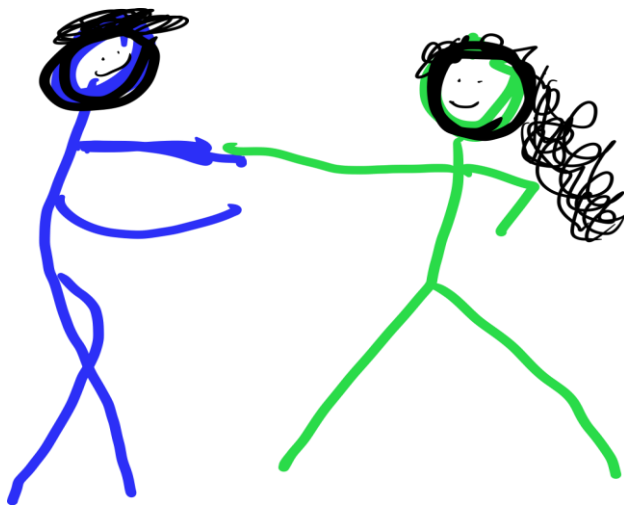
When analyzing couple A's movement qualities and body language, it was clear there was an established connection between the two dancers. There was a sense of shared comfortability and closeness. Movement for the first warm-up song showed a lot of weight held within the lower parts of their bodies, they were grounded. They shared a level of closeness in proximity, maintained close and consistent eye contact, and interacted in a lot of silly facial expressions. For the first song, couple A maintained a low effort state while still dabbling with experimentation within the limits of their dancing. There were a handful of moments that were awkward and disconnected, which is not surprising as the couple began to attune to each other. It was so amazing to witness the small adjustments couple A would do in order to find a new or stronger connection.

Figure 2.1 is a drawing of couple A experimenting in order to find full attunement with each other. The blue figure is the leader who was stepping under themselves and staying more within a small kinesphere while leaning towards their partner. In response to the leader, the follower, who is the green figure, was expanding away from their partner and spreading their body much wider and not directly under themselves. This disconnect was silly and the dancers

responded with a playful approach in order to find their flow together. This was an example where safety plays an important role in attunement. Couple A had an established sense of safety with one another prior to this experiential. They had an understanding of their limits as individuals and a sense of security in their Lindy Hop knowledge and each other. The feeling of safety within themselves and their partner creates space in their dance for playfulness, mistakes, pushing limits, and experimentation. Ultimately, people are able to learn and grow from their failures, mistakes, and experimenting. Feeling comfortable enough in our bodies and ourselves to play and fail in-itself is therapeutic.

**Figure 2.1**

*Couple A First Song: Finding Connection and Attunement*



*Note.* Figure 2.1 shows couple A using play and experimentation to find connection and attunement through Lindy Hop.

It was clear that this experimentation between couple A led to a slight disconnect in their attunement to each other. Pushing these boundaries can be very valuable as it can teach about the limitation of each person. Children learn by pushing their emotional, physical, and relational limits. They gain knowledge through experience and the uncomfortable; dancing is no different.

Through dancing Lindy Hop couple A has learned about growth in connection and conjunction with another person and how our actions, movements and bodies can influence and affect others. After couple A completed the first dance they seemed to be warmed up and connected to themselves and each other way more than prior. This was observed through the way the two individuals interacted with each other after their dance.

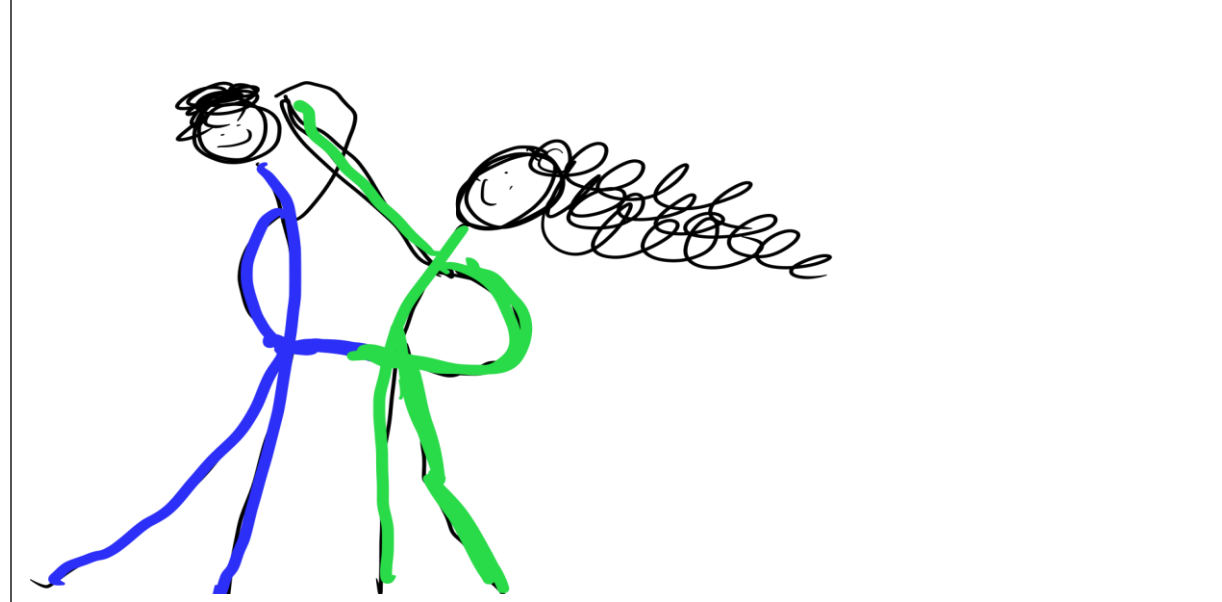
For the second dance, I was surprised how quickly participants were able to drop into themselves as compared to the first song. For the second song, there was a lot more whole-body integration which started within themselves and extended out to each other. The leader showed more connection to the ground through their heel connection and the movements they would now encourage their partner to follow in a more fluid and whole-bodily way. The couple was now utilizing a full range of extension and connection with their limbs. As a working unit, couple A showed a clearer call and response to one-another, which often resulted in a contagious smile and breaking into spontaneous free expression such as throwing different body parts, stretching/leaning and sudden explosive movements. The difference between the first and second dance and their spontaneous free expression, was the first dance each person would throw out different ideas, but they were not listening and responding to one-another. Whereas, in the second dance, they would spontaneously express as a moving unit and take ideas from each other to continue to build the dance together.

By the end of the second song, there was a defined shift in the attunement to one another which was prevalent through analyzing their body movements. They seemed to be enjoying each other much more and expressing authentically as individuals and as a dancing couple. The second song showed they were playing with and off of each other, whereas the first song was as

if two individuals were talking to each other at the same time and not really engaging in the conversation they were making together. The figure 2.2 displays the shift in their bodily connection after attunement has been achieved. The couple is creating a mirrored effect, both the blue and green figure are arching backwards creating a pulled tension between their upper bodies while stretching their back foot behind them. The blue figure is the leader and the green figure is the follower. The diagonal pulls that couple A is making through their mirrored movement is aiding in harmonious and attuned connection.

**Figure 2.2**

*Couple A Second Song: Found Connection and Attunement*



*Note.* Figure 2.2 shows couple A in attunement. Note the similar shape of their bodies and the mirroring effect they created in their bodies together.

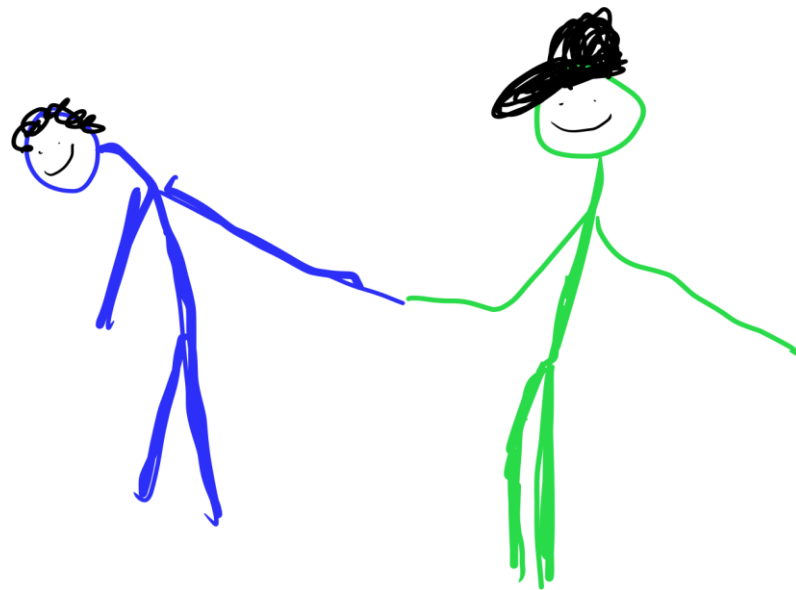
Couple B began their first dance with the leader initiating a lot of push to pull movement. I was curious if the push and pull movement is the lead's way of trying to attune and drop into the connection between them. It is possible that the individual was trying to find the limit of their connection at that moment. With couple B, it was apparent that there was a small disconnect



between them. The leader and follower had different energy levels. The follower was seen keeping their extremities close to their core. The follower would not fully extend their arms or their body and took up a small amount of physical space in the connection. While couple B was attuning to one another, the adjustments were smaller and harder to pick up on than couple A. It is possible this can be because couple B is able to be more attuned to one another and feel the smaller adjustments they make together. The leader in couple B was putting a lot of energy into creating momentum for their partner. As stated before this was seen through a push/pull and in/out movement profile.

**Figure 3.1**

*Couple B First Song: Finding Connection and Attunement Through a Push-Pull*



*Note.* Figure 3.1 shows couple A using their body language to play and find connection and attunement through Lindy Hop.

Figure 3.1 shows a disconnect in the attunement and connection between couple B. The leader who is the blue figure, is seen turning away from the follower. Although they are turned around, this doesn't mean they are disconnected as a partnership. However, the leader is facing

down towards the ground as if to stabilize and find grounding for himself before adding the groundedness to the partnership.

The follower (green) in figure 3.1 seems as if they are waiting for the leader (blue) to initiate the next move. They seem to be stuck in this moment of disconnect and although they are happy in the moment, they are not fully connected to one another. I wonder if the follower is hoping for more momentum, since the leader was providing a lot of momentum in the dance just a few moments prior to this disconnect. It is also possible the follower is simply allowing space for the lead to attune to themselves before coming back to attune to the partnership.

It is also apparent of the lack of full attunement for the first song between couple B because the follower seemed to be slightly behind the leader's movements. It seems as if the conversation couple B is sharing is predominantly being held by the leader and the follower is doing a lot of listening. I want to note that this is also just as valuable and therapeutically beneficial.

Sometimes humans need someone to listen to them and feel seen by someone. This is a great example on how Janet Adlers' (1999) Authentic Movement coincides with the benefits of Lindy Hop. Authentic Movement values the mover being seen and the witness mirroring back to the mover in order to process the subconscious movement into a conscious comprehensive understanding.

Interestingly, couple B had a very distinct shift in their attunement within the last 30 seconds of the first song. The follower had accidentally messed up their footwork pattern and brushed the leaders face with their hand. After this series of small errors, the follower made a very quick shift in her technique and connection with the leader. This shift created a very quick snap adjustment into a more attuned connection with one another. Couple B ended the first song with a hug and laughed about the mistake.

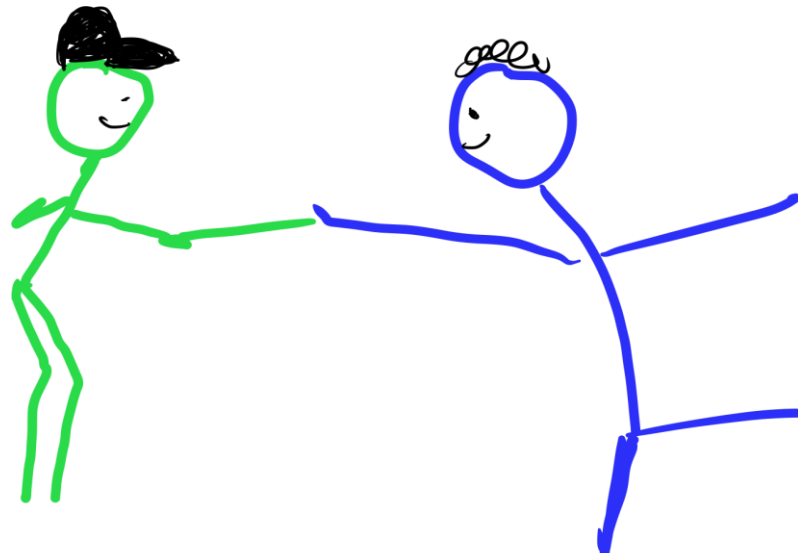
Prior to even starting the second song, couple B was already in connection. This showed that their connection and attunement had already been established in the first song. As the song began the couple seemed to be more relaxed in each other's arms. There was a sense of ease in their bodies that was absent for the first song. Within the first few moments of the second song, couple B was already dramatically different. They were smiling and playing with the music and each other more.

For the second song, I saw an increase in the effort of the follower. The follower was now contributing more to the conversation and listening to the small shifts the leader would invite. As they played together, they were both listening to the music and making movement choices based off what the music was doing. This showed that couple B was not just attuned to each other, but the music as well. Another clear shift was in the way they held the momentum for each other. The follower seemed to be more encouraged by the leader to play with new movement patterns and connections. In the first song, the follower was holding their arms close to their core and not engaging in the connection throughout their entire body. In the second song, the follower displayed a deeper connection to their partner while utilizing their entire body through a heel-coccyx connection.

Couple B still utilized the call/response and push/pull movements to find a deeper connection and attunement. They would even occasionally slow down the movement to connect and allow for more extension of their bodies. The figure 3.2 provides a visual of the follower providing a sense of grounding and balance to the leader so that the leader can express through an extension of their left side extremities.

**Figure 3.2**

*Couple B Second Song: Found Connection and Attunement Through a Push-Pull*



*Note.* Figure 3.2 shows couple A using their body language to play and find connection and attunement through Lindy Hop.

The couple is creating moments of free expression and attune to each other so well, that they are able to create moments of support for one another to express freely. As the second dance continues and the couple attune deeper, the dancers settle more and more into the conversation and adjustments. They continue to develop a stronger attunement as the dance continues.

### **Discussion**

When you become a dancer, you begin to fully understand how the subconscious begins flowing through you and expresses through your body. Once you surrender to the idea of presenting your movement for someone else, and can accept the movement as a part of your present moment and current authentic expression, you can become encapsulated by attunement between you and the music. Imagine how strong that connection becomes when you integrate another individual. It transforms into a conversation between you, the space, your partner, and

each other's subconscious. Being in that state with another human, particularly a stranger, can be extremely vulnerable and powerful. After the two movers in connection feel safe, they can begin to express freely with each other via the music and dance technique parameters. This environment begins to develop a space for each person to express authentically as themselves.

I proposed a question that has never been researched before and attempted to label clear moments of attunement between the partnerships. I connected the feeling of safety and Maslow's Hierarchy of needs to the environment that Lindy Hop creates. I discussed the history and socio-cultural context that created Lindy Hop. I found the connection between dance/ movement therapy fundamentals and Authentic Movement and labeled how Lindy Hop encapsulates these traits. I took four individuals who were experienced Lindy Hoppers and asked them to dance for me so that I could analyze their attunement.

What I have learned the most from this experience is that I am not the only one that views Lindy Hop as a powerful dance that is used for healing. It was originally created to help heal the trauma of Black dancers in New York during extremely challenging times through history. After the experiential was completed, I asked my participants to share with me if they believe Lindy Hop is a good therapeutic tool and they all agreed extensively. The group and I engaged in a conversation about why the participants love Lindy Hop so much and each person had very similar reasons, connection and challenge. Lindy Hop provides community, a place to express yourself freely through your movement and music and challenge yourself creatively.

Lindy Hop has been around for around 100 years. In that time there has been such limited history documentation and research. I have so many questions that were left unanswered. One that comes up the most is if Lindy Hop is a therapeutically beneficial dance through attunement, what population and demographic would benefit from learning Lindy Hop? Being that the

therapeutic aspects come through attunement, I believe that those who struggle with attunement would benefit the most from Lindy Hop. In my experience being a Lindy Hopper, I have noticed that there are a large number of dancers that are on the autism spectrum. Individuals with autism struggle with attunement and socialization but thrive in environments with set rules and expectations. Lindy Hop is a very structured dance style that provides a balance of concrete structure while also encouraging social interaction, creativity, expression, and attunement. In regards to further research, I would be interested to learn if there is a connection between Lindy Hop and the benefits it can provide to the autism community. I was able to find one article (Mulder-Rosi, 2014) that discusses the potential benefits of Lindy Hop and Swing dancing with people on the autism spectrum. However, no actual research or application has been done. Lindy Hop and social dancing as a whole has such impacts on us on both micro and macro levels. The impacts are so comprehensive that dancers and researchers alike are unable to fully comprehend the scope of the benefits.

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***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

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Expressive Therapies Division  
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Drama Therapy, MA**

**Student's Name:** Sarah Trowbridge

**Type of Project:** Thesis

**Title:** The Therapeutic Benefits of Attunement Through Lindy Hop

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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